

## JAH Forum

# NONCONFORMITY IN AFRICA'S CULTURAL HISTORY\*

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### Abstract

This article uses E. P. Thompson's last book – *Witness against the Beast* (1993) – as an occasion to claim oddity, peculiarity, and nonconformity as subjects of African history. Africa's historians have been engaged in an earnest effort to locate contemporary cultural life within the *longue durée*, but in fact there was much that was strange and eccentric. Here I focus on the reading habits and interpretive strategies that inspired nonconformity. Nonconformists read the Bible idiosyncratically, snipping bits of text out of the fabric of the book and using these slogans to launch heretical and odd ways of living. Over time, some of them sought to position themselves in narrative structures that could authenticate and legitimate their dissident religious activity. That entailed experimentation with voice, positionality, and addressivity.

### Key Words

South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, social, religion, culture.

For scholars and students of the African past, 'history from below' – the headline for E. P. Thompson's 1966 essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* – has become a trademark.<sup>1</sup> Since the foundation of *The Journal of African History*, the phrase 'history from below' has appeared in over fifty articles and book reviews.<sup>2</sup> The titles of books published in recent years reflect the enduring attraction of Thompson's phraseology, especially to scholars of South Africa: there is *Forging Democracy from Below*, about 'insurgent traditions' in South Africa; there is *Transition from Below*, about trade unions in South Africa; there is *Beyond Territoriality: A Geography of Africa From Below*; there is *Developing Africa From Below*, about neoliberalism; and there is *Transformation from Below*, about racial

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1 E. P. Thompson, 'History from below', *Times Literary Supplement*, 3345 (1966), 279.

2 The phrase is most often offered without a reference to Thompson himself, who is only mentioned in 11 articles.

zoning in South Africa's cities.<sup>3</sup> Thompson's phrase gave Africa's scholars a position from which to write. Here the scholar's vocation was to identify with the bottom of the social order, to bring to light the activity and experience of the marginal and the oppressed. This ethical impulse was the foundation of the whole enterprise of social history. Nancy Hafkin and Edna Bay introduced their 1976 book *Women in Africa* by promising a 'changed viewpoint': rather than accepting male scholars' derogatory account of African women, Hafkin and Bay assured their readers that 'women in Africa act as agents of change within their own societies'.<sup>4</sup> The South African historian Charles van Onselen similarly sought to bring marginal people into focus. His study of the Witwatersrand took as its subject 'selected groups of ordinary people', bringing into view the 'warm, vibrant and intensely human struggle of people seeking to find a place of dignity and security within a capitalist world'.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, Thompson's influence on the field was institutionalized in the 'Social History of Africa' series, published by Heinemann and edited by Allen Isaacman, together with (successively) Luise White, Jean Hay, and Jean Allman. One of the first books published in the series was Keletso Atkins's *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money!*, a Thompsonian history of labor discipline among Zulu workers in Natal.<sup>6</sup> Over the ensuing years the Heinemann series published dozens of books. It set the standard for historians of Africa in the 1990s – the series won four Melville J. Herskovits<sup>7</sup> awards during that period.

E. P. Thompson's last book, *Witness against the Beast*, was published in 1993, the same year that he died.<sup>8</sup> It is a study of the antinomian Christianity that informed the work of the great British poet William Blake. In it Thompson introduced his readers to a dizzying array of dissenting groups – the Muggletonians, the Behemists, the Quakers, the Church of the New Jerusalem – that emerged in the theological hothouse of eighteenth-century England. The Muggletonians, for instance, believed that the serpent in the Garden of Eden had entered fully into Eve, and that it was perpetuated in Cain and in Cain's offspring. Hence there were implanted in the human race two contrary principles, diabolic and divine, the offspring of Cain and the offspring of Seth. The Muggletonians never numbered more than 240 devotees in all. But the sect, founded in the late 1600s, continued to thrive during the following century. Believers spent many hours copying the works of their forebears, circulating doctrinal polemics, and transcribing letters from believers in far places. For Thompson, sects like the Muggletonians were 'hegemony's eighteenth century

3 E. J. Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Traditions in South Africa and El Salvador* (Cambridge, 2000); K. von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging the Trade Unionism Workplace Change in South Africa* (Pietmaritzburg, 2003); M. B. Arrous, *Beyond Territoriality: A Geography of Africa from Below* (Dakar, 1996); F. Wanyama, *Developing Africa from Below: Reflections on Neo-Liberal Assumptions in Kenya* (Saarbrücken, Germany, 2010); U. Scheidegger, *Transformation from Below? White Suburbia in the Transformation of Apartheid South Africa* (Basel, Switzerland, 2015).

4 N. Hafkin and E. G. Bay (eds.), *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford, 1976), 5.

5 C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914, Volume I: New Babylon* (London and Johannesburg, 1982).

6 K. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us Our Money! The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Portsmouth, 1993).

7 The Herskovits Prize is presented by the African Studies Association (ASA) to the author of the most important scholarly work in African studies published in English during the preceding year. This annual prize is named in honor of Melville J. Herskovits, one of the ASA's founders.

8 E. P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York, 1993).

opposition'. Antinomian doctrines expressed a profound distrust for the 'reasons of the genteel and the comfortable, and of ecclesiastical and academic institutions, not because they produced false knowledge but because they offered specious apologetics for a rotten social order based on violence and self interest'. At a time when 'everything in the age of reason and elegance served to emphasize the sharp distinctions between a polite and demotic culture', antinomianism was 'an extreme recourse for the excluded'.<sup>9</sup> It took a critical position on the hegemonic culture and invited converts to act as dissidents.

The Muggletonians have never caught the attention of Africa scholars. *Witness against the Beast* has never been cited in *The Journal of African History*, the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, or the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. There has been very little space for antinomianism of any kind in Africanists' scholarly work. The focus, instead, has been on continuity, on the underlying lineaments that draw past together with present. Seeing African history in the *longue durée* has been both an analytical challenge and a moral commitment. The search for evidence of African agency obliged scholars to identify the cultural and political resources that animated action and led Africans to act at variance with colonial dictates. If Africans were to 'act as agents of change within their own societies', they had to be motivated by the memory of earlier, more equitable, more authentic modes of living. In labor history, the search for agency obliged scholars to highlight the ways in which preindustrial forms of sociality shaped the practices of colonial-era workers.<sup>10</sup> In theology and religious history, scholars have felt it important to demonstrate that African Christians and Muslims stand in a continuous relationship with the underlying forms of traditional religion.<sup>11</sup> Scholars of health and healing have sought to identify a distinctively African alternative to biomedicine, grounded in the therapeutic practices of healers who promoted social integration and wholeness.<sup>12</sup> Students of intellectual history have illuminated the forms of discourse – inherited from the distant past – that have guided the development of contemporary modes of thought.<sup>13</sup>

But in fact there was much that was odd, unconventional, and strange about Africa's cultural history. Not every cultural production was anchored in the past, and neither was every act of agency motivated by a desire to protect older standards. A great number of heterodoxies emerged out of dissident readings of the Christian scriptures. Like the Muggletonians, African nonconformists studied the Bible intensely, and from it they

9 Thompson, *Witness against the Beast*, 109–10.

10 See Atkins, *The Moon is Dead*; Allen Isaacman, *Cotton is the Mother of Poverty: Peasants, Work, and Rural Struggle in Colonial Mozambique* (Portsmouth, 1995); and many other works. Thompson's influence on the field of labor history is assessed in Frederick Cooper, 'Work, class and empire: an African historian's retrospective on E. P. Thompson', *Social History*, 20:2 (1995), 235–41.

11 Argued in P. Landau, "'Religion" and Christian conversion in African history: a new model', *Journal of Religious History*, 23:1 (1999), 8–30; and in D.R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent* (Cambridge, 2012), ch. 1.

12 S. Feierman, 'Struggles for control: the social roots of health and healing in modern Africa', *African Studies Review*, 28 (1985), 73–147. See also S. Feierman and J.M. Janzen (eds.), *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley, 1992). I have criticized this literature in D.R. Peterson, 'The politics of transcendence in colonial Uganda', *Past and Present*, 230:1 (2016), 197–225.

13 S. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Wisconsin, 1990); J. Lonsdale, 'The moral economy of Mau Mau', in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London, 1992), 315–504.

derived inspiration for strange, cloistered, peculiar ways of living. Christians of the establishment – European missionaries and African elders alike – looked upon these nonconformists with scorn. Establishment Christianity encouraged Africans to see themselves as legatees of their ancestors: it upheld (most of) the powers that be, buttressed (selectively) traditions, supported the standardization of vernacular languages, reinforced (notionally) conventional gender identities, and encouraged the writing of ethno-historical work.<sup>14</sup> In this way establishment Christianity was an engine for the production of orthodoxies and invented traditions. Nonconformists horrified the establishment because they would not bend the knee to ancestral tradition, to convention, or to inherited wisdom. They interpreted the Bible without acknowledging the enclosures of orthodoxy.

In this article I identify the interpretive habits – the ways of reading – that promoted nonconformity. Nonconformists invested themselves in particular sentences in the Bible, looking for fragments of text that could authenticate idiosyncratic ways of living. They left a scant documentary trace. Theirs was not a Christianity that tended toward the memorial or the library. Their interpretive practices led them to live athwart the grand narrative of cultural redemption – of recovery, restitution, and heritage – that structured the project of conservative reform.

## WAYS OF READING

The Gospels – especially *Mark* – were the first books that translators rendered into African vernacular languages. Early converts scrutinized it with great care. In central Kenya, where *Mark* was available in the Gikuyu language from 1908, missionaries reported ‘an intense craving after knowledge of God’ among their converts. A few years after the gospel’s publication one missionary reported that his house servants gathered round the kitchen fire every evening, engrossed in the task of reading through *Mark*.<sup>15</sup> Another missionary reported that her Gikuyu students, tired of *Mark*, were reading through the New Testament in Swahili as a means of ‘learning more of the Word of God’. The conclusions they drew from their work were sometimes idiosyncratic: one group of Gikuyu students, reading in Swahili about the Pool of Bethesda in John’s Gospel, were convinced that in Jerusalem there was a great kettle with five eyes in which sick people were boiled.<sup>16</sup>

Missionaries worried about these odd interpretations of the Bible, and they carefully curtailed the circulation of texts, trying to control their converts’ reading habits. They were especially uneasy about the Old Testament. The Catholic bishop of Nyasaland thought the Old Testament to be ‘very dangerous’. He refused to allow its translation into the African languages of the colony, and vowed that he would not allow his own daughter to read it before she was married.<sup>17</sup> In Uganda, missionary translators brought out a heavily redacted series of Old Testament stories several decades before the Old Testament itself

14 D. R. Peterson and G. Macola (eds.), *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens, OH, 2009).

15 Rev. Youngson, ‘The soul-hunger’, *Kikuyu News*, 32 (Dec. 1911).

16 M. Stevenson, ‘The Kikuyu language committee’, *Kikuyu News*, 37 (Aug. 1912).

17 J. McCracken (ed.), *Voices from the Chilembwe Rising: Witness Testimonies Made to the Nyasaland Rising Commission of Inquiry, 1915* (London, 2015), 385.

was published.<sup>18</sup> Phrased in simple language, the book was a collection of pithy tales about heroism, self-sacrifice, and devotion. Kenya missionaries likewise published a collection of Old Testament stories in 1917 under the title *Mohoro ma Tene Tene*, ‘Stories of Long Ago’.<sup>19</sup> The Old Testament as a whole was not published in Gikuyu until 1951. The lead translator worried that Gikuyu readers would ‘try to read and understand [it] for themselves without any outside aid. They will have no one at hand to whom they may turn for the explanation of the very many strange things they will encounter.’<sup>20</sup> During the Mau Mau war Gikuyu men incarcerated in detention camps were supplied with copies of the New Testament, and warders used it to show ‘how Paul changes his attitude of opposition to missionaries . . . how the most terrible sins can be forgiven, how the teaching of Jesus gives absolute moral standards . . . how a Government set-up accords with the will of God’.<sup>21</sup> The Old Testament was kept out of Mau Mau detainees’ hands, as officials thought it encouraged subversive thinking.<sup>22</sup>

Missionaries’ investment in the New Testament was paralleled in early African converts’ political thought. The story of the New Testament is a story of cultural renovation. The protagonists are a small band of men who, driven by a revelation, challenge the elite of their time over the leadership of their people. Early African converts – themselves members of a small minority within their societies – thought this story of cultural and religious rejuvenation to be tremendously useful in their own politics. In Kenya, the first generation of Christian converts found their political vocation in the newspaper *Mwigwithania*, the ‘Reconciler’, published by the Kikuyu Central Association between 1928 and 1931. They borrowed the title of their newspaper from the New Testament, which had been published in 1926. In *Hebrews* 12:24 translators had used the term *mwigwithania* to refer to Christ, the mediator between the old covenant of Judaism and the new dispensation of Christianity.<sup>23</sup> On the pages of the newspaper *Mwigwithania* converts adopted the project of mediation as their own. Literate converts argued that they were uniquely positioned to protect their forefathers’ fragile oral wisdom against the threat of loss. As one of them wrote:

Remember that formerly there were Kikuyu tales, and these caused people to remember many things of former times; and you who go to school see that the other nations write down everything that was done long ago, that so the children born now may know what the people of former times were like, and what their customs were. . . . If it were possible, those who are grieved for our people should begin to write down everything about former times, and the tales, like those about ogres, so that afterwards people will be able to read all these things.<sup>24</sup>

18 See, for example, C. J. Harner, *Ekitabo Ekitegeza Ebyafa mu biro ebyeNdagano Eyeda* (London, 1906).

19 *Mohoro ma Tene Tene* (Church of Scotland East Africa Mission, 1917).

20 Kenya National Archives (hereafter KNA) MSS (BS) 1/2, Arthur Barlow to Howard Church, 19 Jan. 1946.

21 Rhodes House Archive (hereafter RH) Mss. Afr. s. 2257, Howard Church, ‘Athi River detention and rehabilitation camp’, 4 Apr. 1955.

22 J. Breckenridge, *Forty Years in Kenya* (Great Britain, n.d.), 223.

23 This paragraph is modeled after J. Lonsdale, “‘Listen while I read’: Patriotic Christianity among the Kikuyu”, in T. Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honour of J. D. Y. Peel* (Durham, NC, 2005), 563–94.

24 KNA DC/Machakos 10B/13/1, James Muigai, editorial letter, *Mwigwithania*, 1:8 (Dec. 1928–Jan. 1929).

The newspaper was full of calls for record-keeping, for the archiving of endangered cultural property. The newspaper itself acted as a venue where the work of cultural archiving could be accomplished. Contributors exulted in the permanence of paper, which conferred upon otherwise forgettable knowledge both solidity and longevity. As one of them wrote in an essay concerning Gikuyu ways of telling time:

We should on no account forget these hours of ours, but unless we write them down in our book of unity of the Kikuyu people, it appears to me that succeeding generations will forget things like this and become Swahilis, for they will not talk genuine Kikuyu.<sup>25</sup>

At a time of great transformation, historical preservation was where the men of the Kikuyu Central Association found their calling. They were one of a number of contemporary organizations that likewise invested themselves in the curatorship of traditional culture. Rapid urbanization, demographic change, and the frailty of human memory were endangering the fundamentals of the social order. Standing at the edge of the colonial world, preservationists used their skills to reconcile old with new, orality with literacy, the old religion with the new religion. The Yoruba, the Manyika, and Zulu, and many other groups were likewise constituted out of the work of conservative reform.<sup>26</sup> It was in the midst of a tectonic shift of Africa's cultural history that reformers staked their claim to political leadership. The changing tides of time made the work of conservation both essential and urgent.

But there were other ways of reading the Bible, and other ways of being in time. In 1932 Kagana wa Chege had a dream in which the voice of the Lord instructed him to read *Hebrews* 8:10–11. The Biblical text is a refutation of Israel's exclusionary religious hierarchy: in it God promises that 'All shall know me, from the least to the greatest.' In his dream Chege was also directed to *Psalms* Chapter Seven, where the psalmist warns that God has 'bent the bow, and made it ready . . . he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutor'.<sup>27</sup> In his dream a man appeared, showing Chege how to fabricate arrows. The next morning, Chege awoke and set to work making arrows, not knowing what they were to be used for. By 1934, Chege's followers had banded together with other nonconformists to form a fissiparous movement called *Watu wa Mungu*, the 'People of God'. The People of God refused to wear European shoes or clothing. They let their hair grow long. In one locality they were said to go about roaring like lions, possibly in imitation of *Hosea* 11:10, where 'those who walk with the Lord' are said to 'roar like lions'.<sup>28</sup> In another place they renounced the use of pots, cups, and spoons, since Europeans had brought utensils to Kenya. They prophesied that the Angel Gabriel was soon to visit the earth, punishing the rich and bringing eternal wealth to the poor.<sup>29</sup> In some places they refused to pay taxes.<sup>30</sup>

25 KNA DC/Machakos 10B/13/1, S. Njuguna wa Karucha, editorial letter, *Mwigwithania*, 1:6 (Oct. 1928).

26 J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indiana, 2000); L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1991).

27 KNA PC/CP 8/7/3, Assistant Supervisor of Police, Nakuru, to Commissioner of Police, 21 May 1934.

28 KNA PC/CP 8/7/3, District Commissioner, Fort Hall to Provincial Commissioner, Nyeri, 29 Mar. 1934.

29 Presbyterian Church of East Africa archives, St Andrew's Church, Nairobi (hereafter PCEA) I/C/12 and 13, Teacher at Nyeri to R. G. M. Calderwood, 31 Oct. 1930.

30 KNA PC/CP 8/7/3, Commissioner of Police to District Commissioner, Meru, 9 Jan. 1936.

British officials thought the People of God were insane: one policeman commented on their ‘peculiar and wild facial expression’, and wondered if their derangement was ‘a result of their faith or whether they were previously unbalanced and so adopted the faith readily’.<sup>31</sup> Gikuyu Protestants thought the People of God were devilish: a Presbyterian teacher called them *aceni*, ‘barbarians’, and wondered at how ‘Satan has enriched the hearts of these people.’<sup>32</sup> In fact, the People of God belonged to the same intellectual and cultural world that the ambitious reconcilers of the Kikuyu Central Association inhabited. All of the leaders of the People of God were products of Protestant mission schools – the visionary Kagana wa Chege, for instance, had learned to read and write at the American Baptist mission in Kijabe. But where the leadership of the Kikuyu Central Association parlayed their education into a claim for cultural leadership, the People of God founded an alternative cultural economy. Here there was no credentialing, no acknowledgement of expertise. The People of God had no teachers, and neither was there a program of instruction. Here there was, also, a different way of reading. Men and women alike had nighttime visions directing them toward specific passages in the Bible; the following day literate men read the passages aloud to public assembly.<sup>33</sup> For the People of God there was no narrative momentum to lend meaning and direction to the exposition of the text. They read Biblical texts in snippets, finding specific passages – like ‘he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutor’ – that could be the foundation for peculiar behaviors. That is why other Gikuyu Christians found them to be so odd. Where the mediators of *Mwigwithania* were placing themselves as the center of a great historical narrative concerning the reconciliation of cultures, the People of God were plucking passages out of the Bible and creating idiosyncratic lifestyles.

The Watu wa Mungu were one among a great number of dissident groups that mined the Bible for material by which to organize peculiar ways of living. Nonconformists saw the Bible as a sticker book, an ensemble of separable sentences that could be lifted out of the whole fabric of the book and appended to novel life practices. It was as though they came to the text through the index, reading texts in snippets. Here the infrastructure of the Bible was particularly salient. The Bible came to colonial Africa with a pre-established architecture: the book was divided into chapters and verses, and virtually each sentence was numbered. Missionary translators could and did disagree over the vocabulary, grammar, and orthography of African languages. But the division of the Biblical text into chapters and verses was never questioned. Evangelical missionaries encouraged their converts to adopt a granular, sentence-by-sentence approach to Scripture. Among the first books to be printed in Gikuyu as in many other African languages was the *The Peep of Day*, an instructional book containing simple lessons for use in Sunday School. Every lesson offered a Bible verse that readers were encouraged to memorize.<sup>34</sup>

The practice of granular reading could launch all sorts of idiosyncratic movements. In western Kenya, the middle decades of the twentieth century witnessed the inauguration

31 KNA PC/CO 8/7/3, Police Superintendent, Nakuru to Commissioner of Police, Nairobi, 21 May 1934.

32 PCEA I/C/12 and 13, Teacher at Nyeri to R. G. M. Calderwood, 31 Oct. 1930.

33 Anglican Church of Kenya Archives, ‘North Highlands Rural Deanery’ file: ‘Watu wa Mungu Description and Ideology’, n.d. (but 1934).

34 F. L. Mortimer, *The Peep of Day; or, a Series of the Earliest Religious Instruction the Infant Mind is Capable of Receiving* (New York, 1845).

of dozens of heretical and schismatic movements among the Luo- and Luhya-speaking people of the region. The Dini ya Roho Huru – the ‘Church of the Free Spirit’ – was founded in 1938 when its leader read verses 20 through 23 of *II Samuel* Chapter Six. The text described how King David had leapt and danced before the Ark of the Covenant, and how Michal, daughter of Saul, had scorned him for his untoward display. In the text David defends his display as an act of devotion; the scornful Michal is in verse 23 said to have remained childless until the end of her days. The members of Dini ya Roho Huru took these verses as a guide to living. In keeping with verse 23, they were opposed to childbirth, seeing childlessness as the just reward for human frailty. And they made a habit of confessing their sins while naked, in imitation of David’s guileless self-display before the Ark. In September 1954 several members of the church were arrested when, at a public meeting of the sect, a man and a woman disrobed in full view of an astonished crowd.<sup>35</sup>

The Dini ya Roho Huru was one among an ensemble of tiny sects, each of them diligently pursuing their dissident enactments of Christian scripture. The Dini ya Roho Huru had 22 members in 1956. Others had a somewhat larger constituency: the ‘African Church of the Holy Spirit’ had 3,242 members. It is difficult to sort them all out: a police report mapping the lineal relationship among western Kenya’s schismatic sects ran to 44 pages.<sup>36</sup> Government did not know what to do with them. There was no organizational leadership with whom officials could confer, and neither was there a creed, nor a statement of faith, by which to evaluate their religious doctrine. When one of the sects applied for a license to conduct marriage, the local government official found it impossible to ‘pontificate on the question of whether the [sect] is a Christian church or not’.<sup>37</sup>

Nonconformists disagreed over the smallest things. It was their granular reading of texts that gave each sect a distinctly parochial identity. A cohort of sects in western Kenya looked upon the charismatic martyr Alufayo Odongo as their founder. Odongo – ordained as an Anglican priest – had broken with the church in the early 1930s, having heard a night-time voice telling him to read *Matthew* 24:24–28, in which Jesus warns against ‘false Christs, and false prophets’. Odongo gathered hundreds of people around his parish church, denouncing drinking, promiscuity, and the wearing of charms. They claimed to be able to heal the sick and raise the dead, and practised long periods of silence, modeled on Christ’s forty days in the wilderness. Odongo and five of his followers were martyred in 1934 when their neighbors, who objected to their presence in the village, burned them alive in their homes.<sup>38</sup> In the wake of Odongo’s martyrdom, people inspired by his example competed over the interpretation of his legacy. The members of ‘Dini ya Roho Maler’ conventionally wore white robes with a cross on the breast, accompanied by the letter ‘S’ in red, referring to Musanda, where Odongo had been martyred. Their pastors’

35 KNA DX 21/9/1, Special Branch to Supervisor of Police, 21 Aug. 1956.

36 KNA DX 21/9/1, Provincial Supervisor of Police to Director of Intelligence and Security, 1 Sept. 1956.

37 KNA DX 21/9/1, District Commissioner North Nyanza to Registrar General, 26 May 1961.

38 These events are described in KNA DC/North Nyanza/10/1/1, District Commissioner Kakamega to Provincial Commissioner Kisumu, 9 Feb. 1934; and ‘Enquiry under the collective punishment ordinance into the disturbances at Musanda, Wanga, North Kavirondo’, Feb. 1934. See C. Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (New York, 1996).

robes featured a spear sewn in red next to the cross, referring to the spear that had killed Odongo. Members refused to eat with people who were not members of their sect. They spoke to each other in an inspired language, largely unintelligible to other Luo speakers, and there was a substantial hymnody in the sect's vernacular, taught to the young at a small school.<sup>39</sup> Here was a group that was organized around esoteric and obscure things. By 1956 they numbered 2,810 people. Another group, called the 'Dini ya Lalruok', claimed about 400 members. It regarded unconverted people as emissaries of Satan. When an unconverted person visited the house of a member of the Dini ya Lalruok, the dishes on which he had eaten had to be thrown away, and fire had to be passed over the place where the visitor had sat. Members of the group refused to lend their clothing to unconverted people; neither would they go on journeys in outsiders' company.<sup>40</sup> There was an aggressive insularity to these and other nonconformist groups. They were animated by the particularity of their commitments, by the specificity of their interpretations with Christian texts, by the granularity of their memories and symbols. Here there was no effort to draw outsiders into a narrative of redemption. Here, instead, was a peculiar and enclosed way of living in the world.

Many of these unorthodox sects were to labor in obscurity and, eventually, to disappear. A few, however, managed to parlay their idiosyncratic reading of Christian scripture into dogma, the foundation of a new denomination. The African Israel Church Nineveh was founded in 1941 by a former schoolteacher, Zakayo Kivuli.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by *Luke 8:17* – which read 'For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest' – Kivuli and his followers made a practice of confessing their sins in public. Police observers reported that they cried bitterly and made a sneezing noise when making their confessions.<sup>42</sup> The police thought Kivuli had the 'facial appearance of a fanatic' but the manner of a 'hard headed businessman'. Church officials kept careful books detailing collections and listing catechumens.<sup>43</sup> Kivuli was especially careful about politics: when he preached for a gathering in Nairobi, he told attendees to pray for the British King. An angry attendee asked him 'Are you going to follow the European customs?'; Kivuli replied 'Yes, for in heaven we are going to live together.' After the Nairobi meeting, disgruntled attendees plotted to assassinate him. He had to be rushed from the scene by a sympathetic Catholic priest.<sup>44</sup> Kivuli's loyalism was politically controversial but strategically important. In the mid-1950s, the same period that the government closed many of Kenya's African-run churches, Kivuli's church went through a period of expansion. The sect's distinctive flag of green, white, and orange was said to stand for the three races – African, European, and Asian – cohabiting in happy unity.<sup>45</sup> By 1958 the church reported nearly 5,000

39 KNA DX 21/9/1, District Commissioner Kakamega, 'Unorthodox religious sects calling themselves Dini ya Roho', 16 Aug. 1956.

40 KNA DX 21/9/1, Special Branch to Supervisor of Police, 21 Aug. 1956.

41 Kenya National Archives, Kakamega depot (hereafter KNA Kakamega) DX/8/10, Kivuli to District Commissioner Kisumu, 14 June 1948.

42 KNA DX/21/9/1, Superintendent of Police, 'The African Israel Church, Nineveh', 6 Feb. 1957.

43 KNA DX 21/9/1, Special Branch, 'Dini ya Israel in North Nyanza', 4 July 1953.

44 KNA Kakamega DX/8/10, Father Guido Benedicto to D. C. Kakamega, 16 June 1950.

45 KNA DX/21/9/1, Superintendent of Police, 'The African Israel Church, Nineveh', 6 Feb. 1957.

members, with branches in Mombasa, Mwanza, and Musoma in Tanganyika.<sup>46</sup> In 1963, as Kenya's politicians were preparing for independence, Kivuli was confident enough to write to the Council of Ministers to ask that his church should have a special seat in the country's new parliament.<sup>47</sup> Today the church claims some 500,000 members and 3,500 clergy, and is a constituent of the World Council of Churches.<sup>48</sup>

## EXPERIMENTS WITH NARRATIVE

As the history of Kivuli's church suggests, the space between nonconformity and orthodoxy was no means unbridgeable. But in order to get leverage and gain recognition in the colonial world, nonconformists had to find a narrative in which to position themselves. They had, that is, to claim a lineage and create a story linking their contemporary faith to antique precedents. That is what it took to scale up nonconformity. Nonconformists had to find institutions and frameworks that could render idiosyncrasies legible to government and to the establishment. They had to place themselves within a history that could authenticate the oddities of their commitments.

Their experiments with narrative self-positioning were shockingly ambitious, and in some places it is possible to see nonconformists casting about for a narrative to claim. Probably the most ingenious nonconformist in Eastern Africa was Reuben Spartas. Born in 1899 and educated at King's College Budo – Uganda's leading school – Spartas enlisted in the King's African Rifles in the years following the First World War, and was posted as a teacher to a military school north of Kampala.<sup>49</sup> During his military service he began to read Marcus Garvey's newspaper *Negro World*, gathering regularly with a group of fellow soldiers to discuss the contents. He and his fellows formed an organization called the 'Pan African Association' and opened up a correspondence with the Kenyan dissident Harry Thuku. Spartas' letters – which have recently come to light in the newly-catalogued deposits of the Uganda National Archives – show him searching for a position from which to launch a critical account of colonial Uganda's politics. Writing to Thuku in 1925, he cast a wide net:

The whole North Africa now are struggling and fighting to unyoke from bondage of France, Italy and Spain. And if God has heard our laments [He] will surely send his assistance to those poor Moors and given them such tremendous victory.<sup>50</sup>

Spartas went on to describe black South Africans' struggle against unjust land policy, and assured Thuku of his personal commitment to the largest of causes.

I am striving, struggling, trying day and night to have something done for my beloved race, African. And I shall not end there till the whole Black Race, whole Africa has been thoroughly

46 Makerere University Library, Africana section archives (hereafter MUL) Ms. 276.762 Afr, 'Annual Report of the African Israel Church, Nineveh', 1 Mar. 1958.

47 KNA Kakamega DX/8/10, Kivuli to Council of Ministers, 28 May 1963.

48 (<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/african-israel-nineveh-church>), accessed 30 Mar. 2016.

49 Spartas's biography is given in Frederick Welbourn, *East African Rebels* (London, 1961), 77–110.

50 Uganda National Archives (hereafter UNA) 'C series', box 13, C.1002, R.S.S. M. Sparta, 4<sup>th</sup> K.A. R., Bombo, to Harry Thuku, 20 June 1925.

redeemed. Therefore be of good cheer because we, the brave, true, determined sons of Africa are ready to fight to the last man for the independence.

In 1927 Spartas was discharged from the army and opened a school of his own in a suburb of Kampala. Uganda's Police Commissioner thought him to be 'of outstanding ability' and 'probably a born agitator. He . . . has idealistic aims at making Uganda a country to be run by Africans.'<sup>51</sup>

It was at this time that Reuben Spartas began to experiment with Eastern Orthodoxy. In 1929 he wrote to government officials, identifying himself as the 'Supervisor' of the 'African Orthodox Church, Uganda'. His title notwithstanding, Spartas was speaking on behalf of a tiny constituency – at the time he could count only one other person in his congregation.<sup>52</sup> Later that year he opened a correspondence with Rev. David William Alexander – bishop in of the Garveyite 'African Orthodox Church' in South Africa – about the arrangements for an ordination service in Uganda. Alexander promised that it will 'be a great day for Africa, when an African in the heart of Africa will be ordained to the priesthood by an African bishop'.<sup>53</sup> Alexander visited Uganda for several months in 1931 and 32, ordaining Spartas and one of his colleagues as priests of the African Orthodox Church on 22 June.<sup>54</sup> The crowd at the ordination service numbered 1,600 people; the newspaperman who covered the story thought the mass – in the key of F – was 'sung most carefully, showing that those who sang it had taken much time and patience to learn it'.

Spartas and his followers were undoubtedly sincere in their attachment to orthodoxy. But it must be said that their ecclesiastical allegiance was an elective matter. In the latter months of 1938 Reuben Spartas was in correspondence with the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, Nicholas, who agreed recognize Spartas's church as a constituent of the Greek Orthodox communion. The initiative came entirely from Spartas. When queried about the matter by the agitated British governor, the Alexandria patriarch could say nothing to vouch for Spartas's theological training or for the correctness of his ordination.<sup>55</sup>

What was it that Reuben Spartas found in this most recondite of orthodoxies? For Spartas, being orthodox was a way of leveling the religious and cultural hierarchies that defined colonial Uganda's politics. The kingdom of Buganda was the most avowedly Anglican society in all of colonial Africa. The 1900 Agreement, signed between the British crown and the three regents of the Buganda kingdom, was the legal cement that confirmed the Protestants' position. It consolidated power in the hands of a hierarchy of largely Protestant chiefs, eliminating the spirit mediums, ritual experts, and clan heads who had formerly exercised authority in Buganda's politics. By 1935 two of the three ministers in the Buganda government, ten of the eighteen county chiefs, and 92 of 153

51 UNA 'C series' box 13, C.1002, Commissioner of Police to Chief Secretary, 18 Jan. 1927.

52 BNA FCO 141/5908, File note on Reuben Spartas, n.d. (but 1945).

53 Church of Uganda Archives, Mukono, Uganda (hereafter CoU) 02/Bp 8/1, Bishop Alexander to Mukasa Sparta, 11 Sept. 1929.

54 MUL Ms. 276.761 Afr., *Matalisi*, 22 June 1932.

55 BNA FCO 141/5908, Nicholas, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, to the Governor of Uganda, 6 Feb. 1939.

subcounty chiefs were Anglicans.<sup>56</sup> It was the antiquity of orthodoxy that appealed to dissidents like Spartas. Orthodoxy made establishment Protestantism appear inauthentic, specious, a form of religious charlatanry. It placed African dissidents in the center of things. In a 1933 letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Spartas described how, as a student in an Anglican school, he had felt ‘unrest, always very miserable, very dull, very tired for the disunion that predominate over so called Christians!!’.<sup>57</sup> Then he read church history, and found that the Anglican and Catholic churches were ‘only branches but near real and actual foundation of Christianity, or better still, not True and exact Church founded, built, and established by Christ himself and his apostles’.<sup>58</sup> Orthodoxy allowed the activist Spartas to position his dissident Christianity within a history that predated Anglicanism, making Buganda’s establishment appear parochial and schismatic. In 1931 Spartas composed a patronizing letter to the Anglican bishop, encouraging him to introduce crucifixes and church art in Anglican buildings.<sup>59</sup> When the bishop called him to repent for encouraging schism in the church, Spartas replied by identifying the African Orthodox Church with a long and proud history:

What sin did I commit? I am exceedingly and deeply sorry to state that I will surely never repent until Martin Luther, Calvin, Erasmus, King Henry VIII, Huguenots, Barrow, Parker, Wycliffe, Cranmer, King Edward VI, Latimer, Queen Elizabeth, Wolsley, the Protestant Episcopal Church, Booth, the Scotch church, the old Catholic church of Holland, the South Indian Church, the Baptist Church, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Broad Church, Reformed Church, Low Church, High Church, and so many others have repented, very well then I will myself come last and make my repentance please. Amen.<sup>60</sup>

Spartas’s war of position was waged with particular force in his postal correspondence. Stationery is a place from which to write. It attaches an institutional imprimatur to the flow of correspondence, locating the writer in place. Spartas was well aware of the work that stationery could do, and he took particular care over it. In his first correspondence with the Anglican bishop Spartas headed the page with the Garveyite phrase ‘Africa for Africans’. The return address was given as

The African Orthodox Church, an Independent African Episcopal Church with Apostolic Succession through the Patriarchal See of St. Peter at Antioch  
Degeya  
Bulemezi  
P. O. Bombo<sup>61</sup>

56 Rubaga Cathedral Archives, Kampala, Uganda (hereafter Rubaga) D.99 f.2, ‘Synopsis of comparative list of Catholic and Protestant chiefs in Buganda’, 1935. For scholarship on Anglicanism and Buganda’s political identity, see Holger Bernt Hansen, *Mission, Church and State in a Colonial Setting: Uganda, 1890-c. 1925* (London, 1985); M. Twaddle, *Kakungulu and the Creation of Uganda, 1868–1928* (London, 1993); Peterson, ‘Politics of transcendence’.

57 CoU 02 Bp 8/1, Reuben Spartas to Archbishop of Canterbury, 26 Sept. 1933.

58 MUL Ms. 276.761 Afr., Spartas Mukasa, ‘History’, 1946.

59 CoU 02 Bp 8/1, Mukasa Spartas to Bishop Willis, 16 Feb. 1931.

60 CoU 02 Bp 8/1, Spartas to Bishop Stuart, 21 Apr. 1935.

61 CoU 02 Bp 8/1, Spartas to Willis, 17 Nov. 1929.

This address was not meant to ensure the smooth working of the postal system. Spartas was writing from a theological position, not a particular place. In later correspondence he began to describe the church and school he had erected in Bombo as ‘Villa Jerusalem’ in his return address. In the years that followed he experimented with different return addresses. In 1931 he wrote to the Anglican bishop under a Latin heading ‘Pax Tebis’. In subsequent correspondence he headed his letters with the phrase ‘Pax Nobiscum’, meaning ‘Peace be With Us’.<sup>62</sup> These were pastoral greetings. They established a hierarchical position between the orthodox and the Anglicans, allowing Spartas and his colleagues to claim a paternal authority over the whole establishment. Even though he owned and used a typewriter, all of Spartas’s correspondence on behalf of the Orthodox Church was composed in flowing, carefully rendered calligraphy. His letters resembled the beautiful manuscripts that are the characteristic documents of medieval Christianity.

This was a form of dissenting religion anchored in the deep time of ancient Christianity. Becoming orthodox was a way of inverting the civilizational hierarchy of colonial Uganda, transforming a colonized people into the forebears of their British rulers. It was an act of civilizational jujitsu. As a form of cultural and religious criticism Spartas’s church proved to be both enduring and popular. By 1960 Spartas was responsible for the supervision of several orthodox churches in western Kenya. In 1961, on the eve of Uganda’s independence, he traveled to Greece to drum up financial support for his church.<sup>63</sup> By 1968 the African Orthodox Church had been admitted as a full member of the newly-formed Uganda Joint Christian Council. Today the African Orthodox Church in Uganda claims some 300,000 members, with 67 ordained clergy.<sup>64</sup>

There were other narrative architectures with which Spartas could work, and other histories to claim. At the very same time that he was positioning himself within the deep time of Christian Orthodoxy, Spartas was also experimenting with other forms of addressivity. In 1945 there were at least a dozen political organizations that used Reuben Spartas’s post office box – number 508 – as their mailing address. They included the ‘Baganda Landlords Council’, the ‘Baganda Credit Bank’, the ‘Uganda African Chamber of Commerce’, the ‘Uganda African Motor Drivers’ Union’, and the ‘Uganda African Cooperative Society’.<sup>65</sup> These organizations spoke on behalf of an astonishingly wide range of constituencies and interests. Reuben Spartas played an active role in the superintendence of their correspondence. He seems to have taken pleasure in trying out different voices. One voice in which he spoke was as one of the ‘Bazzukulu ba Kintu’, the ‘Sons of Kintu’. The organization had been inaugurated in 1938 before a crowd of sixty people in Old Kampala.<sup>66</sup> Spartas was the main speaker at the occasion; he was duly elected as president, and his postal box was thereafter the Association’s mailing address.<sup>67</sup> Kintu was the

62 My thanks to Dr Ben Fortson for help with Spartas’s Latin.

63 British National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter BNA) FCO 141/18239, British Embassy, Athens, to Foreign Office, London, 24 Feb. 1961.

64 See (<http://orthodoxmission.org.gr/country/uganda/>), accessed 28 Mar. 2016.

65 BNA FCO 141/5908, L. Sharp, Director of Security and Intelligence, notes on Leubeni Spartas, 4 July 1945.

66 Jonathon Earle discusses the ‘Sons of Kintu’ in ‘Reading revolution in late colonial Buganda’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 6:3 (2012), 507–28.

67 UNA ‘C series’ box 23, file C.2462, Resident of Buganda to Chief Secretary, 29 May 1941.

mythical founder of Ganda polity: in the distant mists of time he had inaugurated the kingdom of Buganda and fathered the royal line.<sup>68</sup> By calling themselves the ‘Sons of Kintu’ Spartas and his colleagues were leveling out the difference between themselves and the Protestant aristocrats who governed the kingdom. Spartas conventionally headed his correspondence for the ‘Sons of Kintu’ with the exhortations ‘Katonda Omu! Ekigwenerera Kimu! Ekiwummulo Kimu!’, or ‘One God! One Aim! One Destiny!’. It was a reminder of shared identity. When the Kabaka – the king of Buganda – refused to recognize the ‘Sons of Kintu’, Spartas replied by insisting that the Association spoke for all Ganda people:

Kintu Descendants includes all the Baganda from every corner of Buganda country, including the ministers . . . chiefs and the members of the Lukiiko [legislature] . . . because the chiefs, all of them who form the Buganda government, do take their origin from the King Kintu as well as ourselves.<sup>69</sup>

Spartas thereafter made the return address in his postal correspondence out as

Reuben Spartas  
Office of the Kintu Descendants  
All Bagandas

It was from this position – as a spokesman for all Ganda people – that Spartas addressed himself to Buganda’s aristocracy. In a series of letters from 1938 and 1939 he and the other ‘Sons of Kintu’ campaigned for a more democratic, more responsive government. They asked that chiefs – hitherto appointed by the Kabaka – should be subject to election by a popular vote. They asked that the newspaper business, which was closely controlled by the prime minister, should be free to report on political affairs. They wanted loans from the government to set up small businesses. They asked that latrines should be built as a means of improving hygiene. And they wanted a committee to write up a grammar of the Ganda language.<sup>70</sup> The ‘Sons of Kintu’ were advocating for an infrastructure of democracy. God was ‘no respecter of persons’, they told the Kabaka in their petition; he ‘inspires men with truth and justice to work and live for the welfare and protection of their fellow men’. In a letter protesting the unchecked power of Buganda’s aristocracy he argued that

We are decided and determined to fight their tyranny . . . in the same way as was done by the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England and Scotland, Oliver Cromwell, in 1654–1659, when he said to the tyrant, Begone and make room for better men. So, unceasingly, we will fight for our country and our constitutional Kabaka as we live under the UNION JACK which bespeaks of justice, freedom and fair play.<sup>71</sup>

Spartas’s letters on behalf of the ‘Sons of Kintu’ were composed on a typewriter. They do not look like the beautiful manuscripts that he composed for the African Orthodox

68 Discussed in N. Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charlottesville, 2010).

69 UNA ‘C series’ box 23, file C.2462, Spartas Mukasa, I. K. Musazi and others to Governor, 20 Oct. 1939.

70 UNA ‘C series’ box 23, file C.2462, Descendants of Kintu to Kabaka, 19 Sept. 1938.

71 UNA ‘C series’ box 23, file C.2462, Reubeni Spartas Mugimba and others to Governor, 29 Sept. 1939.

Church. This was a demotic correspondence: it was meant to be reproduced, circulated, and read by a wide constituency. His letters were addressed to a political community founded on fraternity, in shared descent from a common ancestor. Spartas and his colleagues were grounding Ganda polity within the space of lineal time – the time of *fraternité* and *égalité* – and in so doing they were constituting themselves as brothers, bound by blood and history to resist tyranny. This was a means of engaging with Britain's own political history, and of relating Buganda's politics to democratic political theory. The political and philosophical triumphs of British liberalism were for Spartas a fertile means by which to criticize the inequalities of Buganda's aristocratic society. As Spartas and 329 'Sons of Kintu' wrote in a letter to the governor:

What shall we think of the freedom which is so often spoken of by the British people? How will justice and fair play (which differentiate the English people from other European tribes) be considered by the Baganda people? ... In the great war we stood together, and many of the sons of Buganda fell in the battle field fighting in the hope that as a race we would be able to assist in extending the benefits of democracy to our country ... We permitted ourselves to be dispatched to various battle fronts in Africa, where we fought most loyally for the triumph of the sacred principles of human liberty, democracy and civilization.<sup>72</sup>

Spartas – himself a military veteran – was aligning Ganda people with their British rulers as co-participants in the theater of patriotic sacrifice. It was a moral position derived from the evidence of shared commitment, spilt blood, and other elemental bonds. It made the tyranny of Buganda's aristocrats look out of place, discordant, and unjust.

Here was a colonial subject who would not stay in place. Reuben Spartas was not engaged in the recovery of ancient traditions, in the revivification of endangered cultural property, or in the reconciliation of new with old. His activism was not structured by the narrative of cultural redemption that informed conservative reformers in other parts of Africa. Spartas was nimble. He moved from position to position, looking for footing on which to more effectively address the problems and controversies of his time. That is why he could be – at the same time – a priest of the Orthodox Church and a 'Son of Kintu'. Everywhere he worked to open up space for commoners, for the undoing of autocracies, for the end of dictatorship. In the late 1940s he was at the head of the Bataka Union, the first and only populist political party in the kingdom of Buganda's history. Thousands of commoners gathered at the public meetings that the Bataka Union organizers convened on the outskirts of Kampala. Meetings were conventionally led by Reuben Spartas, who took pleasure in reading aloud the incendiary correspondence from his nephew, the London-based activist Semakula Mulumba.<sup>73</sup> At a time when wives, children, and clients customarily knelt in the presence of their social betters, Bataka activists conventionally greeted each other with shouts of 'BU', an abbreviation of the organization's initials. 'We must squeeze and hold together like wax', wrote Mulumba in a 1948 epistle. 'We are one nation, there is no distinction'.<sup>74</sup> The Bataka called for the democratization of

72 UNA 'C series' box 23, file C.2462, Spartas, Ignatius Musazi and 328 others to Governor, 13 Mar. 1939.

73 C. Summers, 'Grandfathers, grandsons, morality, and radical politics in late colonial Buganda', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 38:3 (2005), 427–47.

74 Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival*, 89–90.

Buganda's parliament, for popular elections to choose government chiefs, for increased educational opportunities for commoners. One day in April 1949 the Bataka assembled in thousands in the grounds of the palace of their king, and demanded a hearing from the aristocrats who governed them. In the riot that ensued Bataka activists destroyed 115 buildings, 75 of them belonging to Buganda government officials. Rioters also burned the houses of a profiteering butcher and the editor of a pro-government newspaper.<sup>75</sup> Not a single building owned by the Anglican Church was burned.<sup>76</sup> In the aftermath of the riots Reuben Spartas was convicted of 'rebellion against the Kabaka', and sentenced to 16 years in prison.<sup>77</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In colonial Africa men and women of the establishment saw themselves as curators of ancestral culture. Through organizations like the Kikuyu Central Association they invented traditions, preserved patrimonies, and documented their forefathers' wisdom. They saw themselves as a majority, a people. It is their declensionist view of time – as a long struggle against amnesia, loss, and indiscipline – that proliferates in the archives with which historians work. Other people – a minority condemned by their establishment contemporaries – created ways of living that were peculiar and enclosed. Nonconformists did not protect a patrimony. They did not honor their fathers' wisdom. As with the English nonconformists of whom E. P. Thompson writes, African dissenters' idiosyncratic interpretations of the Bible gave them reason for a 'stubborn skepticism in the face of established culture, a fortitude in the face of its seductions or persecutions'.<sup>78</sup> Their dissident politics, I have argued, was structured by their particularized way of reading. Nonconformists read selectively, granularly, snipping texts out of the fabric of the Bible and using them to uphold a life of peculiarity. They lived at a tangent to the dialectics of the age.

Over time, some dissidents – like Reuben Spartas – managed to position themselves in narrative architectures that could authenticate their religious activity and expand their constituencies. That entailed experimentation with voice, with what Mikael Bakhtin calls addressivity. But most of these dissident churches were disinterested in outreach. They did not make converts. It is for us, professional students of history, to recover their stories, for most of them did not have heirs to carry their idiosyncratic ways of life forward. What seems to be needed in our contemporary times are not histories from below but histories of dead ends. In the recovery of idiosyncratic lifestyles scholars can fortify contemporary public culture with a more robustly diverse account of the past and furnish today's nonconformists with a history to claim.

75 RH MS Afr. s. 1825/106, J. Sibly, 'Diary of the riots in Uganda, 26 Apr. to 1 May 1949'.

76 CoU 02 Bp 181/20, Cyril Stuart, circular letter, 17 May 1949.

77 Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival*, 102.

78 Thompson, *Witness against the Beast*, 5.